

AN ACCOUNT  
OF  
THE EFFECTS PRODUCED BY A LARGE QUANTITY  
OF  
**LAUDANUM TAKEN INTERNALLY,**  
AND OF  
THE MEANS USED TO COUNTERACT THOSE EFFECTS.  
BY ALEXANDER MARCET, M. D. F. R. S.

ONE OF THE PHYSICIANS TO GUY'S HOSPITAL,

---

---

*Communicated Dec. 1806.*

---

---

ON the sixth of November last, Mr. Astley Cooper informed me, at four o'clock in the afternoon, that he had just seen a young man about eighteen years of age, who had taken, at ten o'clock in the morning, no less than *six ounces of laudanum*, the whole of which had remained in his stomach, and had brought on symptoms which appeared to threaten immediate dissolution. Mr. Cooper who did not

see him till three o'clock, that is about five hours after the accident, acquainted me that he had made him swallow, at half past three o'clock, a solution of one drachm and a half of white vitriol, or sulphat of zinc, which had produced some nausea, and had made him vomit about one ounce and a half of fluid which had a strong smell of opium; notwithstanding which the lethargy had gradually increased, and he had at last fallen into a state of complete insensibility. Some mustard had also been administered, without any obvious effect.

Mr. Cooper having requested me to see this gentleman, and to take any farther steps which circumstances might suggest, I called upon him a few minutes after four o'clock, when I found him on the floor, resting on his knees with his body leaning forwards and supported by two friends, who, as I afterwards learnt, were in the act of laying him down in order to let him die in peace. His head was hanging lifeless on his breast, with his eyes shut and his countenance ghastly. His respiration was slow and sonorous, like the apoplectic breathing. His hands were cold, and the pulse beat from ninety to ninety-six strokes in a minute, in a feeble and irregular manner. All the muscles of his body were in a state of extreme relaxation, and the flesh of his arms in particular felt singularly soft and inelastic.

Blue vitriol or sulphat of copper being the first remedy that occurred to me as likely to produce

vomiting, about half a drachm of this substance was quickly dissolved in water, and the patient being abruptly raised from the floor and strongly shaken, he opened his eyes, and seemed disposed to offer a kind of feeble resistance to the attempt he saw us about to make. We succeeded, however, in pouring into his throat about half the quantity of vitriolated copper, just mentioned, that is a dose equivalent to fifteen grains, which he swallowed with a kind of agonizing effort. Immediately after this, his countenance, which had been for an instant roused, became still more ghastly. But he had scarcely taken the dose one minute when he suddenly threw up a large quantity of a brownish fluid, which had a strong smell of laudanum, and was immediately followed by two or three more gushes of the same liquid, the whole amounting to between one and two pints. He was then made to swallow some warm water, and was dragged from one room to another, with a view to counteract the state of torpor above described. His limbs at first were quite passive and lifeless, but in a few minutes he began to rest, in some degree, on his legs, with the assistance of his friends. He continued, however, with his eyes closed, (unless roused by a loud and sudden call) his pupils dilated, and his breathing apoplectic. I strongly recommended to his friends, who fortunately were extremely active and intelligent, that he should be kept incessantly on his legs, and in constant motion about his room.

When I called again at nine o'clock in the evening, I found him so far recovered as to walk about the room supported by a friend. His countenance appeared more natural, and he was able, when urged by questions, to answer by monosyllables like a man in a state of extreme intoxication. He had vomited once or twice more since I had left him in the afternoon. He gave me to understand that he felt cold at the pit of his stomach, hot on the surface of his body, and cold in the extremities. In spite of this improvement he still slept profoundly, and snored loudly, even whilst in the act of walking about the room; and when forcibly roused, he opened his eyes for an instant and fell again into a deep slumber. Mr. Cooper saw him also in the evening, and we both agreed in recommending that he should be kept in the same state of forced activity through the night, that he should take frequent doses of *assa-fœtida* with volatile alkali, of camphor, or even of musk, if other stimulants did not appear sufficiently active. It was also agreed that his head should be blistered and sinapisms applied to his feet. Some tea and coffee, and likewise lemon juice, (of which he had taken small quantities during the evening with very good effect,) were directed to be frequently offered to him, and we strongly recommended that he should never be longer than half an hour at a time during the night, without being roused, in order to take either some medicines or some liquid nourishment.

On calling the next morning, (November 7th) I

learnt that he had got so much better by twelve o'clock at night, that his friends had found it unnecessary to apply the blister, and that a few doses of camphorated julep, with *assa-fœtida*, were the only remedies he had taken. But he had frequently sipped small quantities of tea, coffee, and lemon juice, all of which were extremely grateful to him. He was prevented from going to sleep, and kept in constant agitation by his friends, till six o'clock in the morning, when he was allowed to go to bed.

On the following morning, between nine and ten o'clock, I found him still asleep; but on my approaching his bed, he readily awoke being rather confused at first, but soon recovering himself, he said, he supposed he had slept three or four hours, which was exactly the case, and complained of his throat being sore, as if excoriated. He observed also, that a glyster which had been administered during the night, was coming away by degrees, mixed with fæces, without his being sensible of it, or able to prevent it.

On the following day (November 8,) he was able to take a walk out of doors. His appetite was not yet returned; but he was not averse to taking food. He still complained of soreness in his throat, and also at the root of his tongue, both of which were evidently the effects of the caustic antidotes he had swallowed. He had had no passage through his body since his illness, except that which was occa-

sioned by the glyster. He still looked sallow and dejected, and complained of an uneasy sensation at the pit of his stomach, not, however, amounting to pain. I advised him to take a dose of rhubarb and calomel.

In a few days after this he was perfectly recovered. The circumstances which occasioned this accident having no sort of connection with the symptoms which it produced, I have thought it useless to enter into a detailed account of them. But I should not omit to observe, that after a strict inquiry into all particulars, it was perfectly ascertained that the quantity of laudanum taken was actually six ounces.

The inference which may naturally be drawn from this case, and which, indeed, induced me to consider it as sufficiently important to be communicated to the Society, is, that neither the lapse of several hours after an accident of this kind, nor the failure of various means of relief, should prevent the administration and diligent repetition of the most powerful emetics.